

# Inventing Latin America Under the Good Neighborhood Policy: The Case of the MoMA Collection, 1943

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**Abstract.** This article describes the strategies of the North American government to help establish a Latin American Collection in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the role that Lincoln Kirstein had as a collector of the works that made up the collection. The dialogue that Kirstein had with various personalities of the culture in the tasks of exhibition and collection is analyzed. We emphasize how the fine arts were spaces of political weighting, and areas usable by Good Neighbor politics. Finally, it is explained what kind of Latin American art was collected to make up the collection in 1943, and what idea of Latin America was represented through that selection. The research uses primary sources collected from MoMA Archives, Rockefeller Personal Archives, New York Public Library and Lincoln Kirstein Archives. The comparative method in history was used to review the different cases analyzed.

**Keywords:** *Good Neighbor Policy, Latin American Arts, Lincoln Kirstein, Soft Diplomacy*

Received 21 February 2022 | Revised 18 April 2022 | Accepted 27 April 2022

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, studies on cultural networks and their implications in Latin America have drawn the attention of researchers. The case of networks created between North America and South America during the 1940s illustrates how cultural diplomacy had designed tools to strengthen the so-called Good Neighbor policy bonds. In 1939, Nelson Rockefeller persuaded President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the importance of the arts in the diplomatic exchange and sent him a project about cultural cooperation with South America. Roosevelt decided to create the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) and appointed Rockefeller as director.

Authors as Gisella Cramer conduct research on the OCIAA and Roosevelt Politics revisited aspects and results from the office. Darlene Sadlier, in her book “American All,” has analyzed the different departments and the importance of Good Will Tours from 1939 to 1945. Also, authors as Ricardo Salvatore, in his studies on “Informal Empire,” have been useful to understand the relationship with the representational machinery of the U.S. government. From the art

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perspective, Olga Herrera's research on Latin American Exhibition has been of enormous significance for my analysis. They don't delve into the construction of the visual narrative about Latin America as part of the Good Neighbor exhibition complex.

This article analyzes the construction of a visual narrative from an informal imperialism standpoint. As cultural diplomacy privileged visual art as an object of exchange, the exhibitions were the result of a political intention. It also examines the specialist's role, Grace Morley and Lincoln Kirstein as government advisors, in particular, Kirstein's work as a curator of South American art for the MoMA Exhibition in 1943.

During World War II, the OCIAA and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), both institutions linked to the Rockefeller family, played an essential role in promoting mutual understanding and cultural exchange between the two Americas. The OCIAA's cultural program was based on the idea that no national defense effort in commercial and military areas could be successful, unless a parallel cultural program developed an active friendship between the Americas. Against that backdrop, not only was it about creating the "representative machinery of an informal empire," as Ricardo Salvatore calls it, but these programs also had to be a political instrument to control damage of Nazi actions in South America.

The OCIAA carried out two central strategies to consolidate its presence in the region. The first was to exhibit. The role of the Arts Committee was to assist in the preparation of the exhibition of "American Contemporary Painting" in 1941 and select the works that would be featured in this exhibition. The second was to create a collection of Latin American art in the United States. Therefore, the last strategy was to collect.

World fairs, such as the 1939 New York World's Fair or the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939), were opportunities to showcase Latin American culture. At this point, diplomatic delegations helped arrange each country's exhibitions.

Art promotion was conceived as a service to strengthen the U.S. political position. Susanna Temkin has analyzed the contribution of the Riverside Museum exhibitions in 1939 and 1940 to this cause. The collective exhibition of the Riverside Museum seemed to confirm the idea of Pan-American art.

The first Latin American Exhibition of Fine and Applied Art was inaugurated at the Riverside Museum on June 2, 1939, introducing more than three hundred and thirty works from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay. As Susanna Temkin claimed, not only was the U.S. interested in carrying out this exhibition as part of its Good Neighborhood policy, but also "Latin American countries [were] eager to establish their position in world politics. Accordingly, both the artworks selected, and the accompanying

catalog descriptions reflected the contemporary political and cultural policies of each nation” (Temkin, 2011).

The show received unfavorable criticism and was seen instead as a weak attempt to familiarize American consumers with Latin American art. In part, this was because some artists with higher aesthetic value were exhibited in the national pavilions, such as the case of Candido Portinari; his murals in the Brazilian pavilion were enthusiastically received and compared favorably with the Mexican murals.

The show consisted of 195 artists and 321 works. Argentinean artists represented 30% of the demographic, and their paintings represented 24.6% of the total. Brazilian artists composed 20% of the total, with a proportion of 12.5% of artworks. Similar proportions can be observed in artwork from Chile and Cuba. Mexico collaborated with 18 artists and 51 paintings. The four most important painters of contemporary Mexican art: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo, represented 33% of the works presented.

The 1940’s exhibition differed from the previous one; it included fewer countries: Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, and Venezuela. In turn, the artistic representation of each country was uneven in numbers.

As a result of these exhibitions, Nelson Rockefeller, in charge of the OCIAA, promoted a complete project: to create a collection of Latin American art at the MoMA, inaugurating an exhibition as complete as possible. It concealed a dual pedagogical purpose: to educate the American public and to show the genuine desire to understand the culture of its neighbors. The acquisition of art was the first step towards a broader agenda. The most ambitious task was to create an exclusive collection for MoMA incorporating (in a unique corpus) paintings owned by the Rockefeller family. This involved collecting, a task undertaken by Lincoln Kirstein. His designation was intriguing. While he was one of the most active intellectuals in New York circles, he was not a Latin American art expert.

Nelson Rockefeller had other goals in mind. He sent Kirstein to South America with political motive: Kirstein already knew South America and had established contacts on a previous trip that could facilitate the search for information about the Nazis activities.

Lincoln Kirstein had become part of the New York intellectual circle through different relationships from his years as a student at Harvard. Edward Warburg, his friend, and colleague stated that “The real basis of all of our discussions was what could be done on the American scene to enable artists, be they painters, musicians, sculptors or any one of the many aspects of art which appeared on the scene, how could they ever be made to be self-supporting, to eat regularly?” (MoMA, 1987). Even with this influence, the decision to entrust him with purchasing works of art to complete a collection was essential and perhaps excessive.

The Museum of Modern Art had a significant commitment to the war efforts in general and the vision of the OCIAA. In 1940, two outstanding exhibitions were displayed/staged in the Museum to introduce Latin American art in depth. The MoMA did not curate these exhibitions, and they had already been circulating in other places. The first one was the *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition, an adaptation of a Mexican art exhibition for the *Jeu de Paume* in Paris, and the second one, *Portinari of Brazil*, was initially shown at the *Detroit Institute of Arts*.

In the first case, it was proposed as a historical vision of Mexican art, portraying an artistic diversity that was already known in New York circles. The exhibition presented an integrated idea of Mexican culture based on the historical development of Mexican art. However, the radicalism of the muralists disappeared. Furthermore, a history without conflicts was represented. Proud of his economic and cultural negotiation achievement with President Lázaro Cárdenas, Rockefeller called it “the greatest installation ever undertaken in the museum” (Vicario, 2015, p. 197).

The show appeared as a coordinated production between the MoMA and the Mexican Embassy and included a bilingual catalog. It was claimed in the prologue that both institutions had wanted the audience in the United States to have an opportunity to study contemporary Mexican art from a historical perspective and presented the exhibition as a dialogue between two civilizations.

The *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition closed in September 1940, giving way to the opening of *Portinari of Brazil* in October. That month, Rockefeller left the MoMA board to take over OCIAA. In the same way, as in the exhibition on Mexican art, where historical significance made art valuable, it was essential to affirm the innocence of the native culture represented by *Portinari* against the politics and commerce embodied by the OCIAA and Rockefeller.

In the *Good Neighbor Policy* years, Candido Portinari was the kind of artist regarded as “exportable,” and he achieved significant visibility in the continent. His works were exhibited in different public buildings in Brazil before arriving in the United States. As it has been extensively studied, the type of paintings that received more praise from the American critics were those that reproduced coffee plantations, workers, or the topic of coffee as predominantly associated with Brazil. During the 1930s, his paintings were exhibited in Lucio Costas’ “*Good Neighbor Hall*” and in Oscar Niemeyer’s *Brazilian Pavilion* at the *New York World’s Fair* in 1939.

For some authors, the triumphant rise of Portinari must be understood in the light of the trade negotiations between Brazil and the United States, “which turned to strategic materials (from rubber to quartz to manganese ore) as both countries entered World War II” (Vicario, 2015, p.23). The “*Portinari of Brazil*” exhibition was held from October 9 to November 17, 1940. It included works from Brazil and others provided by American collectors such as Secretary of State Cordell Hull or businesswoman Helena Rubinstein. Nelson Rockefeller did not have any of the painter’s

works in his collection, but he acquired several the following year. The book “Portinari: His Life and Art” was published as part of the artist’s promotion. Kent Rockwell sustained that Portinari’s work had to be understood in the context of inter-American cultural exchange. Although he carefully put aside all competitive relations between governments:

“Let nations quarrel over trade-in oil, silk, cotton, coffee, wheat, and wool, in minerals, in manufactured goods; let them plot to control the world’s markets, conspire to enslave its people or crusade- let’s call it that-for liberty... Beneath, above, and, somehow, through and through the barriers and smokescreens to understanding, which those things-the nations, interests, war-erect, come art. [...] In [his paintings] we see the landscape, tread the soil; we see its workers and their poverty-not agonized about, just told. And told with love.” (Rockwell, 1940, p.6).

Nature was imposed on the world of politics, highlighting the innocent effect of painting on the global situation and the importance of the Good Neighborhood policy to build bridges with the complicated Government of Vargas. In that situation, Portinari was a kind of “good savage,” affable, that crossed political management in the context of war.

Some critics seemed to see a strong presence of Mexican muralism in his works. Robert C. Smith, director of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress, called Portinari “the Brazilian Diego Rivera”. He affirmed that “unlike Rivera and the Mexicans, he has no didactic social message to expound. However, what he has observed, he states with sympathy and dignity, untouched by propaganda. Upon such a firm basis, Brazilian painting should continue to grow in importance and to play an increasingly significant role in the future art of Pan-America” (Smith, 1940, p.6). Thus, it remained among the most popular aesthetic movements in the United States.

The comparison with the Mexican muralists seemed inevitable. However, not everyone was condescending with Portinari’s work. Milton Brown argued that, while Mexican artists painted within the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, exalting the political content of their representations, Portinari “is producing mural decorations for a semi-fascist government” (Brown 1940, 10). Some may seem ignorant or negligent regarding the political repression of the Brazilian Government, but others, like Brown, would not make that concession, which caused discomfort in the political environment. There was no doubt that the enhancement of his work had a clear political sense, and it was helpful to both countries. An international magazine titled its cover with “Portinari comes as Good Neighborhood emissary,” and his presentation was understood as representing this policy.

Lincoln Kirstein visited Brazil in 1942 and had a similar concern. The Vargas government was a dictatorship. In this regard, he asked Nelson Rockefeller and Archibald MacLeish, a leading intellectual who participated in the OCIAA committees, to intervene in favor of the artists, but did not get any answers. The Good Neighborhood policy did not mean intervention in the internal

affairs of South American governments, and U.S. officials did not expect to break this rule. The contradiction between defending the freedom of the hemisphere and having good relations with a government that persecuted opponents was challenging to cope with. Still, realpolitik and war were imposed on considerations about freedom.

## **2 The Collection Process**

“Lincoln Kirstein is going to Rio on a mysterious and important mission. No one knows if he is going to paint the Corcovado purple or put on a ballet at Congonhas do Campo.” Robert Smith to Candido Portinari, (Smith,1942).

Lincoln Kirstein was sent to South America on two missions: collecting art pieces and gathering critical information for the U.S. Government. As an envoy from the MoMA and the OCIAA, he would report directly to Nelson Rockefeller. The latter had received information about the effectiveness of Axis propaganda in South America and needed to assess the situation with someone he trusted.

In February 1942, the Government granted Kirstein written permission to leave the country from March to September. According to the OCIAA memorandum, the purpose of the trip was a secret mission. The reasons behind his designation were based on the fact that he was “particularly qualified to carry out this mission. He recently returned from just those places we wish him to visit. As few Americans, Mr. Kirstein knows the people, customs, and conditions in the countries to which we have assigned him.” (Rockefeller, 1942). Rockefeller was convinced of the significance of the trip, and, to succeed, Kirstein would have to renew his relationship with the intellectuals he had met during his visit the previous year. In his opinion, the mission directly concerned national health “safely an interest, not only because of the work he will be performing in Latin America, but because of the valuable information he will bring back with him” (Rockefeller, 1942). For this reason, his mission as a cultural mediator was a priority. As we can see, there was no conflict of interest; Kirstein would be serving a function (with different roles) for both institutions. However, this might seem improper since the OCIAA financed an artistic trip, and the MoMA sponsored a secret mission.

During his visit, there was an internal crisis in the Brazilian Government that led to/resulted in a military purge. Due to this, Lincoln Kirstein’s efforts in Rio de Janeiro were linked to gathering political information beyond the initial purpose. He then traveled to São Paulo, where the political situation was even more complicated. His arrival was problematic; police arrested him at the airport, claiming there was a problem with his documentation. The Vice-Consul in São Paulo, John Hubner II, intervened, falsifying some documents to handle the situation.

Kirstein reported to Nelson Rockefeller details on Hubner’s actions and described the political control he exerted. The conversations left a lasting and disturbing impression about the United

States' foreign policy. Hubner detailed the operations performed by the consulate that included repression activities, forgery of documents, and joint actions with the police that reported an improper relationship.

After finishing his activities in São Paulo, Kirstein, exhausted, could not elucidate the truth and severity of these descriptions. He hastened to comply with all matters related to the purchase of artworks, the inspection of museums and libraries to return to Rio Janeiro and continue his journey.

Concerning his artistic objectives, they were not exempt from conflicts and setbacks. He was engaged in a dispute with Osvaldo de Andrade, a notable local writer. Andrade suggested he bought some of his son's paintings, but Kirstein rejected the suggestion. De Andrade tried to file a complaint at the consulate with the support of some artists and threatened to shoot Kirstein if he met him. He reported this situation to Hubner, but the diplomat downplayed the importance of the fact and said that "Oswaldo de Andrade was well known as a bad poet and a bad shot." (Kirstein, 1942).

He noticed the predominant internal divisions in artistic and intellectual circles in Brazil. Not only did they disagree on the United States policy, but also on Vargas' .

On his visit to Argentina, Kirstein was aware that Nazi penetration was one of the main concerns of the United States government. As Ronald Newton pointed out, in 1939, the German intelligence center had carried out a series of tasks in the Argentine Government, including establishing contacts within the armed forces. Additionally, the Government's neutral position favored Germany in using the media, increasing its presence. Until then, Brazil was "the nerve center of Abwehr's intelligence reports in the Western Hemisphere," but the new signals came from the Argentine Government (Newton, 1992, p.52). During 1942, the Allies denounced Argentina, with increasing fury, arguing that the Argentine Government had tolerated the German spies in the country, especially those of maritime intelligence: "the Allied spokesman said that Argentina had the moral responsibility of many sinking of ships and many deaths, including those of women and children."(New York Times, 1942).

In Buenos Aires, Kirstein had strong support from the embassy. James Byrnes (a special assistant) connected him to María Rosa Oliver, writer, and friend of Victoria Ocampo's, who introduced him to several artists. Oliver commented that "we spent a whole morning in Lino Spilimbergo's studio, and Kirstein was very excited about the series of gouaches with scenes of a bad life." (Oliver, 2008, p.101). She introduced Kirstein to Horacio Butler, Alfredo Guido, Raúl Soldi, Demetrio Urruchua, among others.

Kirstein was interested in figurative arts; among his favorite painters, David Alfaro Siqueiros stood out. Kirstein mingled with Argentine painters who worked with Siqueiros, such as Antonio

Berni and Alfredo Guido, who became good friends. In general terms, Kirstein suggested two different and contradictory considerations about the state of the arts in Argentina. On the one hand, he was convinced that, while artists supported the Ecole de Paris, they would not have intellectual autonomy; in other words, they had to get rid of the European influence. However, on the other hand, some painters surprised him with the quality of their works, as was the case of Antonio Berni, who worked briefly with Siqueiros in Buenos Aires, in 1934. From his point of view, Antonio Berni was a unique painter from Argentina who resembled the WPA era and the Treasury Fine Arts Section.

Lincoln Kirstein made a determined effort to create a selection of artists that was representative of the idea of modern art as he conceived it. He bought pieces by painters and lithographers for thousands of dollars. For example, he paid five hundred dollars for a Butler painting and a thousand dollars for Berni's New Chicago Athletic Club, the most expensive of the series. The only drawback with artists in this country would be purchasing some paintings by Emilio Pettoruti. According to the information collected, he concluded that Pettoruti had solid sympathies for fascism (indeed, these ideas were based on the fact that Pettoruti was the curator of the Novecento exhibition in 1930 and was friend with Margherita Sarfatti). Consequently, Kirstein avoided meeting him and did not buy his works.

On his tour in Chile, Kirstein (who already knew Mexican muralists' works well) was dazzled by the Siqueiros project in the town of Chillan. His enthusiasm led him to offer the artist an exhibition at the MoMA. It was a great offer because Siqueiros wished to leave Chile. At that time, he had given lectures in Santiago, focusing on the artists' responsibility in the fight against Fascism and Nazism. It attracted the attention of Claude G. Bower, the United States ambassador. Bower realized that the Mexican painter could be extremely useful in mustering popular support in Latin America for the Allied effort and intended to shelter him under the State Department's wing. Incredible as it may seem, Nelson Rockefeller did not see a contradiction in the fact that the U.S. government tried to sponsor a communist painter as Siqueiros, because the primary purpose was Hitler's defeat, and he insisted on the idea. Finally, given the artist's political affiliations, the Government refused to grant the artist a visa, and the project was aborted.

Creating a Latin American collection would be considered the continuity of a policy followed/pursued by the Rockefeller family since the '20s when they decided to commission some work from Diego Rivera. Since 1931, the Museum had made fifteen exhibits in which different aspects of the world of Latin American art and architecture were discussed. The institution pointed out that the problems in Europe had redirected attention to Latin America, and this seemed to be a clear point. The Museum performed several tasks simultaneously; it took a Latin American art orientation, gave rise to European artists, escaped from war, and made itself a diffusing instrument of political support.



### **3 Exhibiting**

The MoMA Latin American Art Collection was inaugurated in 1943, and it was the most important in the world. It was located on the second-floor galleries and displayed 224 new acquisitions from Kirstein's trip, exhibited first. The collection amounted to 294 works: murals, oil paintings, gouaches, drawings, prints, posters, magazines, photographs. Artworks from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay were presented.

The explanation that MoMA gave about its interest in Latin America did not highlight Good Neighborhood policies but rather the fact that especially in the years 1941-44 communications with Europe was severely complicated, so the Museum focused its attention towards Latin America with great vigor, actively collecting and exhibiting Latin American art. The institution believed the new acquisitions showed the variety and quality of Latin American art "from realistic portraits to abstract and surrealist compositions, some of the images have a particular interest because they are concerned with the people and background of the countries which produced them." (MoMA, 1943, p.21)

The catalog was just over 100 pages, with an introduction written by Alfred Barr and a curatorial essay by Lincoln Kirstein. He received some help from María Rosa Oliver, at that time, hired by the OCIAA in Washington. He often consulted her to understand some reports and understand the artists' political position. As he acknowledged in a letter: "While I know a bit about paintings, I am generally ignorant of their cultural background." As Michele Greet has synthesized, "tended to spurn abstract compositions and avoided politically volatile themes, instead of selecting works that perpetuated a depoliticized didactic version of indigenist, serving a Pan-Americanist agenda." (Greet, 2019, p. 260).

Alfred Barr focused his analysis on how the new material could change the character of the entire collection, mentioning that it was more complete than the European one, but still, there could be some omissions and errors of inclusion. He also warned that there were absences, since some countries had not been visited because of the war, and only Mexico showed a large/substantial number of works. The difficulties of transportation had complicated the representation of sculptures, and the lack of time had made it challenging to represent photography profoundly. The director was concerned to clarify that Kirstein regrets the absence of important compositions by certain Argentine artists.

It is interesting to review how the Latin American collection was compiled; the proportions reveal a biased vision of Latin America. First, only half of the countries of the continent were represented. Second, 32% of the artists were of Mexican origin, with a proportion of 57% of the

works of art that made up the exhibition. They were followed by Argentina, which represented 21% of the artists exhibited and 17% of the works of art. Moreover, Brazil ranked third, with 11.5% of the artists and 12% of the works selected. The representation of Mexican art was overwhelming, and although it could be argued that it was of varied aesthetics, the national bias erased other details.

It was probably the donors' taste, the Rockefeller family's preferences, or the influence of curators and academics. Mexican art (in its diverse styles) represented what sought to be shown as Latin American art. More than half of the exhibition space was dedicated to Mexican paintings, and with these limiting preferences, it was impossible to show the art of other nations to the same extent. As seen in Table 1, Kirstein's works were not part of the exhibition; we assume it was for quality reasons and not aesthetic preferences.

Lincoln Kirstein joined the army three months before the 1943 installation was completed, so Dorothy Miller, associate curator, monitored the last steps. In total, the institution had acquired 195 pieces with resources from the Inter American Fund and received 29 works of art as a donation.

Although the catalog followed an order by country, the show had another configuration. It began with the "modern primitives" in the first gallery, placing those who had some European training in the following modules of the exhibition. As Greet states, the exhibition's composition "reinforced the notion that art from south of the border was naive and disconnected from American and European modernist networks." (Greet, 2019, p. 153). The exhibition included works by Cándido Portinari, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Frida Kahlo, Alfaro Siqueiros, and most of the significant artist from South America.

The exhibition was a success; it was intended to last for two months, but it was extended for another month, given the local public's interest. It opened on March 31 and continued until June 6. Not only was it a triumph for Latin American art, but also, and more importantly, a great success for the experts who managed to spark interest in this art and shift the focus from Europe to Latin America. It was the key to success for the Rockefeller project and the dialogue between experts and politics to create a shared world stemming from art. When the MoMA period concluded, a part of the collection circulated between 1943 and 1944 throughout the country.

Regarding the representation of artists and works, the Riverside show of 1939 seems to be more relevant, in terms of the number of works and artists (329 works and 195 artists, respectively), than the 1943 exhibition. Nevertheless, the MoMA show better represented Latin American art quality.

In the context of the OCIAA, art representatives found themselves at a crossroads in which politics were linked to aesthetic assessments. Within this framework, institutions, such as

museums, proposed various improvements in the value of the set of works, acquiring what was exhibitable in Latin American art for the American public. These institutions developed an “order” in the curatorial sense and represented an idea of Latin America. Additionally, the link between these pieces was Nelson Rockefeller, his office, and the MoMA.

At this point, we would like to discuss what Lincoln Kirstein’s assessments of South American art were. As a MoMA consultant, his main task was to collect art pieces, but what was his opinion about them? Why did he choose these artists? Where did he stand in the field of Latin American art experts? How did discussions with specialists such as Grace Morley (director of SFMOMA) and other critics go?

This topic seems essential for several reasons. The first one is that the 1943 exhibition promoted a joint canonical vision of Latin American art, beyond the preference for Mexican muralists or Portinari’s work at the institution in previous years. This curatorial story linked art to political subordination. The good South American neighbor was represented in this way. It was a naive art, separated from ideological issues and political decisions. Art was subordinated to politics. In short, the exhibition made it clear that the Southern neighbors were good, partly thanks to, and despite that, they did not know modernity, with all the contradictions that this implied.

The second reason why we find this topic relevant is that the MoMA was the leading national stage for contemporary art and was simultaneously becoming a space for international representation in the World War II years. This time brought about a change of direction. On the one hand, The Museum was the Good Neighborhood Policy stage, the platform for multiple exhibits linked to the United States at war, and was, finally, the space where European refugees exhibited their works.

#### **4 Clashing Visions**

Once the collection task was over, Lincoln Kirstein tried to position himself as a “Latin American art expert.” To achieve that, he would have to challenge that who was considered the expert: Grace Morley. She was the director of the San Francisco Modern Art Museum and had participated as a specialist in the OCIAA Art Commission. Between 1940 and 1941, she traveled to South America with two purposes: to gather information on the conditions to exhibit the art show “The American Contemporary Painting.” Secondly, she had the objective of contacting curators, gallery owners, and artists to stage/assemble a Latin American art exhibition to circulate in the United States.

When participating in the OCIAA activities, both had some interaction throughout 1941. Berit Potter claims that competition in the relationship was clearly expressed in Kirstein’s report, where he overlooked the report she had written about Peruvian art in 1940, and which he called with the

devalued term of “notes.” Kirstein argued that Morley’s point of view on the value of Latin American painters was characterized by a “promiscuous optimism, their inaccuracy, and their disregard for technical or aesthetic standards. (...) Dr. Morley is universally loved and respected by all those artists with whom she came into contact, which were comparatively few and generally official (...) No service is done the culture of these republics by indulgence or flattery” (Kirstein, 1942b). This judgment was more a disqualification than a compliment. Potter fails to explain what triggered this competition.

In our opinion, the rivalry and misunderstanding between them began with the Emilio Pettoruti incident, in which Kirstein was taxative about the political orientations of the artist. On his trip to Argentina, the MoMA envoy refused to buy Pettoruti’s works because, according to his information, Pettoruti was a fervent fascist. Kirstein reported this to Rockefeller and Alfred Barr and, thus, handicapped the Argentine painter’s career. As Gustavo Buntrix quoted: Pettoruti was described as an “arrant fascist” and that purchasing his pictures would be a “slap in the face to decent artists here” (Buntrix, 2005, p. 45).

Grace Morley, who had met Pettoruti on her 1940 trip, lobbied for an invitation for him to participate in the Government’s exchange program. When accusations about his ideological inclinations began to resonate in the New York circle, Morley tried to get him an individual exhibition at MoMA (like Portinari’s), which eventually did not happen. Despite her efforts, she failed to convince the influential people around MoMA for the painter’s visit to be successful enough. Kirstein’s political understanding and Morley’s aesthetic reading entered a conflict that Alfred Barr and Henry Allen Moe mediated. Grace Morley never abandoned Pettoruti’s defense since she considered his paintings to be of great artistic value in the Latin American context. In front of René D’Harnoncourt, Francis Taylor, and Allen Moe, her persistence did not go unnoticed by Kirstein. Writing his report, he decided to put aside Morley’s contributions and contended that his statement was original and without precedent, ignoring what Morley had written in 1940 for the Committee of Inter-American Relations in the field of arts, under the title of “Art in Latin American countries.”

Kirstein’s dismissal continued in other ways, such as when he encouraged Barr to organize an exhibition of the work of Uruguayan painter Pedro Figari and suggested keeping Morley apart, claiming that she would appropriate the idea. Potter notes that Morley was not interested in competing with him or the MoMA. The San Francisco Museum did not have New York’s resources, and Morley was more than happy to borrow the exhibitions through the circulation program. In an attempt to neutralize the competition, Morley let Barr know that there was enough space for different specialists within the field of Latin American art. She asserted that “There is enough work for all who possibly can become interested in a generation or more and there will still be more left to do after that”(Morley, 1943a).

Morley sent a letter to Alfred Barr in May 1943, mentioning Kirstein's resentment for her. She did not understand why he was trying to separate her from a field that she had helped build. She hinted at not understanding why none of her writings on Latin American art were mentioned:

After all, I threw everything I knew into the common fund, and he must have had access to my report. He certainly had my blessing on making of it any use he could as everyone [who] works in the field and adds to the knowledge that I had only time to note in the most summary way. I rejoiced when I knew that one more person was interested in the subject and had the opportunity to do something about it (Morley, 1943a).

Alfred Barr eased the situation and tried to reassure her by saying there was nothing against her. Finally, Kirstein sent her a letter, and told her he felt troubled by the atmosphere of friction between each other: "It is perfectly true that I had stated publicly, and in letters that I have a different opinion of Latin American painting than yourself and particularly of individual painters, but I have always vastly admired your courageous pioneering in the field and your enthusiasm and generosity towards the whole picture" (Kirstein, 1943b). Later, Morley told Barr that, after receiving the letter, she was sure that she was poorly informed: "I could not believe you could have any ill will towards me." (Morley 1943b) Aware that the starting point of the tension was his fierce defense of Pettoruti's work, the following paragraph was intended to let him know that there were still ripples from the painter's trip, and she pointed out that "well-informed people seem to coincide with my feelings that he cannot be considered of any a fascist way. On the other hand, I think he is not a communist, and my impression is that he is very little interested in politics" (Morley 1943c).

Kirstein was critical of the Europeanizing environment he found in some countries in South America, particularly Chile and Argentina, and was also disappointed because they did not seem to recognize American technical supremacy in their intellectual and artistic circles. That impression was political, since he thought that the United States was not valued as it should regarding its contributions towards the continent's security. Some of his writings paint a complete picture of his concern and disappointment with the state of affairs in South America: "The Continent has never been less safe for us. Maybe the north (Peru) is ok. However, here it stinks." (Kirstein 1942b). However, to his disgust, while looking for nature, exoticism, and originality, local art offered him a product that imitated European's, or even complete collections of European paintings and sculptures, such as Antonio Santamarina's collection in Argentina.

After his trip, he concluded that South American art was, in most cases, more tributary than a source. Due to this subordination to European culture, only a few artists became of fundamental importance to him. The absence of originality in Latin American art would prove that the United States should play the role of the instigator of the artistic avant-garde. From Kirstein's point of view, the South American scene lacked prestigious artists, although there were exceptions like

Siqueiros, whose mural in Chillán, as we saw, had made a deep impression on him. In his opinion, the murals were magnificent and challenging, and he found them marvelous: “I think Siqueiros is the great painter of the Western Hemisphere.” (Kirstein, 1942c).

At this point, he again argued with Grace Morley, who had a different point of view. While they agreed on the strong influence that European art had on Latin American tradition, Morley thought that local artists had a significant value in their contexts. In her opinion, the comparisons between Latin American, European, or American artists were not appropriate; instead, she was interested in exploring how different artists transformed European inspiration. Reviewing the exhibition catalog, she pointed out to Barr that, although she agreed with the choice of most artists, she believed that Kirstein could have found works that more widely represented the art of some countries: “I don’t always agree with what he says in general, nor in art, with his point of view which usually seems a very personal and somewhat limited one” (Morley, 1943a).

Berit Potter argues that her appreciations of South American art were more favorable and less prejudiced regarding their aesthetic value and fresh content. Morley liked to “know what is going on in the contemporary field everywhere and have a great interest in developments even when there are indications of which I feel the quality inadequate and the expression immature.” (Morley, 1943b). Her perspective seemed to be under construction, understanding that the values of Latin American art should not be measured according to European aesthetics, even if there was an influence on the training of artists. To her, the importance of Latin America being a tributary of European art was in its possibility of becoming one day a source.

It is important to note that Morley avoided making assessments of the political objectives of Good Neighbor politics. At the same time, Kirstein produced a series of political insights, which put him in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, he criticized South Americans for their lack of knowledge on American power. However, at the same time, he believed that the political position of the United States government was unintelligent. To him, the Good Neighbor policy was simple-minded and pseudo-innocent, which was one of the reasons why it failed, for example, in Argentina. Kirstein believed that the Government was betting on a complete German victory. He thought that the Nazis had indirect and specific propaganda, and U.S. diplomacy did not possess reliable and sufficient information to design an effective strategy. In a report to Nelson Rockefeller, Kirstein examined different strategies to make propaganda more efficient. He recommended taking advantage of the sectorial differences between the landowners (“the *estancieros*,” as he called them) and the growing industrial classes to promote different ideas. From his perspective, the landowners were pro-fascists because they had an enormous fear of communism, and the petty bourgeoisie did not have a significant political influence, so, in the case of an Axis victory, both classes would benefit. Therefore, he concluded that Argentina was more afraid of an Allied victory than a German one. In short, the political propaganda of the United States had failed, although he had hoped to be able to contribute to improving the situation.

Behind his disappointments, Kirstein proposed a plan to create a new policy that was both ironic and imperialistic. He indicated that one of the things that the OCIAA could do to have a better understanding was “to train Indian Kids in the U.S, and send them back as leaders of their own people... The Museum is, with luck and money, going to do the first scientific job in Cultural Relations.” (Duberman, 2007, p. 382). Far from proposing a cultural encounter, it reinforced North American superiority, educating and training natives from the continent.

Later, at the time of the Conference of Studies on Latin American Art, in 1945, Barr stated that, although many MoMA people were not specialists on Latin American culture and art (except Grace Morley), they “entered the field in a spirit of discovery” (Barr 1945) hoping that these results would be helpful for further and more in-depth studies. It is impossible to determine how much of this discovery was an encounter between cultures. It seemed to describe a process similar to an intellectual conquest of South America noting that there was a sort of novel discovery from the United States.

Lincoln Kirstein’s work successfully put South American artists on a stage like New York to be internationally recognized. The personal effort he made to bring these painters to this scene earned him the recognition of Alfred Barr, who congratulated him effusively. Collecting, evaluating, and classifying were parts of the “exhibition complex.” He and Barr agreed to acquire the most significant amount of work to select. Although their concern revolved around artists, they were interested in aesthetic valuation. This concern expressed the issue of quality and the possibility of installing these artists in the gallery circuits. Therefore, it is interesting to note those who were selected for the exhibition. Some painters were already recognized as creators of the art of international relevance since the thirties, as in the case of Rivera, Orozco, or Portinari; others were new to the American stage.

In his obstinate comparison with the United States, he reached a predictable conclusion: American painting was “stronger, more vigorous and reborn,” reinforcing his interpretation’s centralist and national character. His trip also convinced him that truly modern and national art was his country. While South American painting was presented as historical, American artists were a representation of contemporary art. From his aesthetic point of view, the most significant limitation of Latin American painting was European influence.

Other efforts were renewed over the years. In 1942, the Rockefeller Foundation gave a \$17,650 grant to the Hispanic Foundation to expand its Archive of Hispanic Culture collection. The project was overseen by Robert Smith, Elizabeth Wilder, and Miguel Covarrubias. In September, a sample of Central and South American art was exhibited at the National Museum in Washington, as well as Mexican art. The latter was titled “Shoulder vs. Shoulder” and was held in the Library of Congress. It was a selection of Aztec prints along with other more modern engravings. There was a long series of exhibitions nationwide, such as *America South of U.S.* (Brooklyn Museum,

1941-42), the United Hemisphere Poster Competition (MoMA, 1942), and The Americas Cooperate (MoMA, 1942), and the MoMA moving exhibitions.

Meanwhile, Grace Morley organized a series of small art exhibitions on Latin America that circulated throughout the country at least until 1945.

## **5 Conclusions**

The first steps taken with the 1939 and 1940 exhibitions gave way to more risky experiments, such as the Macy's exhibition in 1942, all the way to the ambitious 1943 MoMA exhibition. Despite criticism, one of the exciting consequences of the 1943 exhibition was that Latin American art became a topic that made sense in terms of exhibiting and collecting. There is no doubt that the MoMA was proud to have the most extensive collection of Latin American art in the world. It, in turn, placed artwork on a prominent stage, leading to the idea of the value of collecting it. The art of South America took on international importance; the exhibitions reproduced throughout the United States helped consolidate this relevance. Of course, the fact that the MoMA was oriented towards the Good Neighbor policy and the centrality of the war helped make it visible and boost the multiplier effect on the rest of the American museums. However, some features are evident: first, in terms of political instrumentation, these exchanges were instead an East Coast phenomenon, hence the quasi-hegemonic role of the MoMA and the influence of Rockefeller. The second feature is the Mexican bias of the examples of Latin American art that circulated with the exhibition of the New York Museum. The specialist, perhaps an exception, was Grace Morley, familiar with the mural art exhibited since the thirties, relying on these trends rather than each country's currents. Besides, Kirstein's preference for the aesthetics of muralism significantly limited the artistic choices he made on his collection trip.

When we review the exhibitions, we see that, although there is a constant concern about the nations' relative weight, this is not the case for artwork. The comparison of exhibition catalogs from the Riverside Museum exhibitions from 1939 and 1940 and the MoMA reveals that not many pieces are repeated. This is an interesting point. Although high-quality art came from the same nations and artists, there was a diversity of works circulating. Even with these limitations, Latin American art was consolidated in the United States and circulated, such as the Pettoruti exhibition at the SFMOMA. Other institutions such as the PAU (Pan American Union) carried out an intense task of making South American art known through different devices such as publications, posters, copies, and talks. Undoubtedly, these were crucial years in American efforts to pursue an active policy of good neighborhood and win "the minds and hearts" of the neighbors. When studying the plans of the Rockefeller-led office and the initiatives of some of its participants, we know that it was an institutional complex that took place with multiple edges and developments.



In June 1943, the OCIAA Art Section ceased its activities. Although Lincoln Kirstein withdrew from the scene because he enlisted in the army, Grace Morley and René D'Harnoncourt continued coordinating actions with the same orientation. The latter had scheduled a trip to South America with Rockefeller. At that time, he was the director of the MoMA, and he intended to ensure continuity with the previous steps taken. D'Harnoncourt returned to South America in 1945, visiting Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. He gave lectures on U.S. art, particularly Indigenous art, and devoted himself to the task he had begun in previous years to strengthen the link between the Americas.

Over time, enthusiasm diminished, and so did the funds allocate to exhibitions and tours in Latin America. It was foreseeable. Since 1941, the reports stressed several logistical difficulties, excess maintenance costs, and the shipment of materials to perform activities. In many cases, geographical and road restrictions had a high impact on the transfer of the exhibitions, not to mention the delays.

However, as Herrera Ulloa argues, South America became “a testing laboratory for the future art world figures of the 1940s and 1950s who forever changed-both directly and indirectly-the global map of modern art exhibitions and modernism art circuits.” (Herrera, 2017, p. 207) In the 1950s, the MoMA created a program to circulate exhibitions abroad with almost a million dollars budget.

In conclusion we tried to show how the identity of Latin America was built in the interweaving of exhibitions and opinions of the American curators. The U.S. conceptions of Latin American art were spread during the Good Neighbor years, realism and muralism were a central part of the visual narrative that invented the idea of Latin America. From that moment on South American art remained esteemed, and in the 1960s, this time under the Alliance for Progress and Cold War politics, it would be revived with the sixties' avant-gardes.

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